



## ALEXANDRU AVRAM (1956-2021)



Another great scholar left us too early, as the capricious *Tyche* stopped his life in full *floruit*. Aged 64, Alexandru Avram was waiting his retirement from the teaching activities – always fulfilled with seriousness and goodwill – with the great hope to consecrate exclusively to the publications in progress or planned, and thus meant to crown a life dedicated to the study of Antiquity. His work was already both large and important: the exemplary edition of the Callatian corpus (*ISM III: Inscriptions grecques et latines de Scythie Mineure, III. Callatis et son territoire*, Bucharest-Paris 1999) and the recent supplement of Tomitan inscriptions (*ISM VI.2: Inscriptions grecques et latines de Scythie Mineure, vol. VI. Suppléments, fasc. 2: Tomis et son territoire*, Bucharest-Paris 2018, with M. Bărbulescu and L. Buzoianu); the treaty between Rome and Callatis (*Der Vertrag zwischen Rom und Kallatis. Ein Beitrag zum römischen Völkerrecht*, Amsterdam 1999 [*Schwarzmeer-Studien* 7]); the Thasian amphora stamps found at Istros (*Histria VIII. Les timbres amphoriques. 1. Thasos*, Bucharest-Paris 1996 [*Corpus international des timbres amphoriques* 1]) and the Heracleote amphora stamps furnished by a Bulgarian site (*Les timbres amphoriques grecs d'Héraclée Pontique et de quelques autres centres de production recueillis dans l'établissement de Kostadin Tchechma près de Debelt (Bulgarie) (première moitié du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.)*, Constantza 2016 [*Pontica* 48-49, *Suppl.* 4], with P. Balabanov and Y. Garlan); a huge prosopographical repertory (*Prosopographia Ponti Euxini externa*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole [MA] 2013 [*Colloquia Antiqua* 8]). The next decades were destined to large-scale works, as he accumulated both checked materials and outstanding experience: the imminent achievement of the three Scythia Minor fascicules from *Inscriptiones Graecae* (IG X.3.3), consecrated to Callatis, Tomis, and Istros (the first two corpora being almost completed); the continuation of the series *Histria* concerning the amphora stamps from

different centers (he left behind him the finished manuscript on Rhodian amphora stamps, *Histria* VIII.3, using also the observations of a departed friend, the archaeologist Nicolae Conovici); the commented edition of the book-notes of Scarlat and Marcelle Lambrino, concerning the interwar excavations at Istros.

Trained by the former directors of the excavations at Istros, Dionisie M. Pippidi and Petre Alexandrescu, he was actually self-trained, through a progressive accumulation of experience, as he mastered as nobody else the Romanian, Circumpontic and Western bibliography. Thus, his publications will remain a model of philological exigence, of bibliographic information, and furthermore of methodology and historical interpretation.

His activity covered more domains, since his competencies were rapidly recognized and required: proficient redactor of more periodicals (among them, *Il Mar Nero*, *Dacia*, *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, *Studii Clasice*, *Pontica*, *Ancient West and East*); responsible for the Thracio-Pontic sections in *Bulletin Épigraphique*, *Bulletin Amphorologique* (both in *Revue des Études Grecques*) and *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (where he was advisory editor), that is major international tools where he revealed as a diligent *passeur* for obscure publications in vernacular languages, for an advised public; collaborator to the inestimable *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (Oxford); editor, alone or in collaboration, of many proceedings of colloquia (such as the international congresses on Black Sea Antiquities, held in 2009, 2013, and 2017) and tributes (for P. Alexandrescu, 2000 and 2010-2011; for N. Conovici, 2008; for D. M. Pippidi, 2007; for P. Dupont, 2018; for M. Bărbulescu, 2019).

Researcher at the Romanian Archaeological Institute “Vasile Pârvan” and for a short period professor at the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, he decided in 2000 to establish in France, where he was from 2002 professor of Greek history at Université du Maine. The name of this peripheric university from Le Mans became rapidly known to the worldwide through his activity and publications.

Even if his first quality was that of epigraphist and interpreter of Pontic antiquities, he never was confined to this realm, as he had the sense of comparisons and remained devoted to an universal comprehension of the past. His publications, either corpora (see *supra*), either careful editions of unpublished inscriptions or important corrections, are equally illustrating all types of inscribed texts, not only decrees and honorific or religious dedications generally privileged by epigraphists, but also catalogues abundant in ordinary or more rare names, epitaphs with their various material, funerary epigrams with their codes, without letting aside the “minor epigraphy” such as *defixiones*, *graffiti* and *instrumentum inscriptum* (including sling bullets), all of them narrowly exploited for their historical input. In an area of interferences between epigraphy and archaeology, he was one of the very few masters

and innovators of amphorology, as his friend Yvon Garlan. To his main research area, that is Dobrudja, ancient Scythia Minor, he gradually added other regions and extended step by step his points of interest, excelling in each of them: the western shore of the Black Sea (the so-called Left Pontus) and the northern Black Sea area, as well as incursions in the epigraphy of Asia Minor (Bithynia, Pessinus, Dorylaion and generally Phrygia, as he recently developed a passion for Phrygian inscriptions and language), but also more far as Palmyra and Nubia. We may add the astonishing inscription in Persian cuneiforms from Phanagoria, that he had the time to republish and comment, reconstructing the historical context of the Persian domination of the Black Sea area. The published works that he left behind him, excepting the epigraphic corpora and other edited books – that is, more than 230 papers, redacted in several languages – are enlightening mainly the epigraphy, in all its complexity, from the archaic period until Late Antiquity, but the goal was always the historical analysis, using altogether literary sources, inscriptions, and archaeological material. His main points of interest were: the Greek colonization in Pontus Euxinus or elsewhere, with a more nuanced understanding (for instance, the role of *epoikoi*); the territories of the Greek cities in Scythia Minor; their political, economic and cultural history, as well as their institutions and religious cults; the relationships of the western Pontic cities with the native populations and also with the rest of the Greek world; the treaties of the Greek cities with Rome and the various ways of accepting the Roman domination; the question of the *coloni*, slavery and other forms of dependency; more recently, inquiries into prosopography, mobility and onomastics. A selection of his French papers will appear in 2022 at Droz, Geneva, under the title *Le Pont-Euxin antique. Histoire, épigraphie, archéologie (Hautes Études du Monde Gréco-Romain 62)*.

His name was cherished by older scholars, by his colleagues of generation, but also by younger researchers, trained or influenced by him, and the admiration was increasing when, after using his publications, they had the chance to meet him, occasioning memorable dialogues. While being a discrete and modest character, he was very generous with all others. As he rarely received the honors that he fully deserved, he will rest in our memories as a model of scientific devotion, the very image of a scholar with a teaching calling, revered by pupils in Romania, France and other countries, that modelled various vocations.

Although teaching in a French university, Alexandru Avram still remained researcher at the Archaeological Institute of Bucharest, in order to (co)direct the annual excavations at Istros, on the shores of the Black Sea. The sudden death surprised him on the ruins of that Greek city by the beginning of August 2021, among finished manuscripts or others waiting for polishing. His published work survives, giving only an approximate idea about the immense knowledge, potential, and preconized directions of an accomplished historian. Those who had the privilege to know him will remember of a warm friend, combining in private conversations sense of humor and seriousness, expressing judgements that were

always accurate, and illustrating, as the civic decrees used to state on the long-lasting stone, a life valued for his words and achievements (λέγων καὶ πράσσων). To quote a Pontic writer as Strabo, that he used to frequent, Alexandru Avram is to be counted in the field of classical studies among ἄνδρες ἀξιόλογοι/ἀξίους μνήμης κατὰ παιδείαν.

Dan Dana